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SUBJECT: IT'S HARD OUT THERE FOR A (WOMAN) CANDIDATE

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Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre  
for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Three aspiring members of parliament, two women and one first-time candidate, shared their views recently on the difficult and generally very undemocratic process by which a Kenyan attempts to get elected, in particular the party nomination process. Their accounts confirmed what candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, often tell us about the money-driven, opaque, and sometimes even violent process in all major parties. Despite this widely held opinion, there appears to be little concerted effort to correct this serious problem. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Incumbent ethnic Kalenjin (Rift Valley) Member of Parliament (MP) and former Minister Linah Kilimo and parliamentary hopefuls ethnic Luo (Nyanza) lawyer Otiende Amollo and Nairobi physician Josephine Ojiambo shared their insights on the challenges facing aspiring candidates ahead Kenya's next general election, expected in December. All described major obstacles, mostly stemming from the undemocratic and non-transparent manner in which Kenya's political parties are run. This is an oft-heard criticism, including from those who managed to get elected as MPs.

¶3. (C) Despite having been a minister for the first three years of the Kibaki administration, Kilimo, who made her name during her first campaign in 2002 as a successful, educated woman who defied her Kalenjin tribe's custom and refused to undergo FGM, nonetheless described her nomination bid as "not a sure bet." Her tactic the first time around, which she is redeploying this year, is to emphasize that she is a woman, and as such a servant. Trying to run as a man (as a leader, as someone powerful) would backfire, she argued.

Democratic Kenya's Political Parties: Not so Democratic

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¶4. (C) Convincing the electorate, however, is only a small part of the process. Any candidate running for public office must be sponsored by a party. Kenyan electoral law does not allow for independent candidates. Securing the party's nomination requires grit, and money. When Kilimo first considered running for office in her Rift Valley constituency, she was told to not even attempt to get the KANU nomination. She therefore turned to Kibaki's Democratic Party (later part of NARC). Local leaders tried to dissuade her from running, and she had to develop techniques to overcome her disadvantages. "I could trust absolutely no

one," is a phrase she repeats frequently. Kilimo therefore divided the constituency into zones, each with its own campaign leader. Each of her zone chiefs had to remain unknown to the others. Kilimo could not risk them conspiring with each other and her opponents, against her. She also had to hold meetings with supporters at night, so her opponents would not know who she was meeting with. A male candidate, she explained, would simply sit down and drink beer and discuss politics.

15. (C) Nairobi candidate, Josephine Ojiambo, running against the notoriously thuggish incumbent Fred Gumo (NARC party) illustrated similar challenges as woman candidate. She too has divided her constituency into 10 parcels. Ojiambo, a member of the "Biwott faction" of KANU (reftel) also described her struggle for leadership positions within the party. Before the Kenyatta-Biwott split (in which MP Nicholas Biwott attempted to wrest control of the country's oldest party from Leader of the Official Opposition KANU Chairman Uhuru Kenyatta in December 2006), Ojiambo had long been the party's Gender Secretary. Decamping with Biwott was the perfect opportunity to take on a more prominent role. In the Biwott KANU she was selected as the Secretary General. As Biwott and Kenyatta move towards reconciliation, Ojiambo told poloff, she is likely to lose her position. Ojiambo explained that she is very likely to be returned to the party's low ranks because she's a woman. Some pro-Kenyatta KANU members, she added, have made her removal as Secretary General a condition of reconciliation.

Women Unite?  
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16. (C) Poloff asked Ojiambo, naively as it turns out, what about women supporting women candidates? Ojiambo thought women who've "made it" turn their back on other women who wish to run because they themselves were not supported by other women. There is also a zero sum sense among women MPs who wish to preserve their own status fearing that new women coming into Parliament will push them out.

Moles, Cash, and "Bondage"  
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17. (C) Wealthy Nairobi Lawyer Otiende Amollo contesting the Nyanza Province parliamentary seat against incumbent Foreign Minister Raphael Tuju, too, decried the nomination process. One approach he has used was to become a party officer. As chief of fundraising for ODM-K, Amollo has "showed his loyalty to the party," which is normally hard to prove, he explained. A party will suspect an aspirant is a mole, otherwise, he added. Amollo was clear that the problem lies with party governance. Legislation like the proposed political parties bill will help, but the real need is from the party leadership. Even if the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) oversees the nomination process in each party, just because someone is chosen in the nomination election, does not mean the party will give that candidate the nomination papers, he stated. It is that piece of paper that matters. (NOTE: The ECK has not indicated that it will take on administration of party nominations, but has said that it will not recognize candidates whose nomination was not in accordance with a party's constitution. Nominations have yet to take place for this year's election. END NOTE.)

18. (C) Reaffirming Ojiambo's and Kilimo's complaint, Amollo emphasized that without deep pockets, an aspiring candidate should not even bother. He described a recent meeting he held with some fishermen near Lake Victoria. After hearing him out, the voters demanded "to be released from bondage," a euphemism for a small monetary gift for having attended his function. Several more months of handing out cash, or in Amollo's case in this instance, giving them books for their children, is a significant drain on even a rich man's resources. Asked what kind of support the party can provide, Amollo replied simply: none. "I am completely on my own."

19. (C) COMMENT: As affirmative action schemes and dozens of

new parliamentary seats reserved for women are debated, it is clear that there is widespread recognition of the challenges women in Kenya face in contesting public office. Even with legislated advantages for women, without reform towards genuine transparency within parties so that party power brokers hand select their cronies as the exception and not the rule, the candidacy process, for both men and women, will remain relatively undemocratic. Poor party infrastructure contributes directly to the lack of loyalty members feel for their parties. Candidates who shop around for parties that will give them a nomination regularly refer to parties as "vehicles" for reaching public office. Party affiliation often gives little indication of whether a politician is pro-government or opposition. As Kenya and the Mission look ahead to 2012 after this year's election, party development should and will be a key focus. END COMMENT.  
RANNEBERGER